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CHINA

OUR HANKOW OFFICE

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COLOMBO CALCUTTA BATAVIA
SHANGHAI HANKOW FOOCHOW
SHIDZUOKA (JAPAN) DAITOTEI (FORMOSA)

MAR 20 1919

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FOREWORD

THE reason that so little is known of the manufacture of Tea in China is because foreigners have been discouraged from visiting the producing districts — in fact, actual hostility has been shown to would-be explorers.

This trip was inspired by the possibility of persuading the Natives to improve their methods, a difficult task, as all of them are convinced that the system adopted by their ancestors and hallowed by antiquity must of necessity be better than any modern ideas. The result of the visit leaves us astounded that any quality at all is exhibited in China Tea. The crop may be said "just to happen," as there is no attempt at cultivation nor is any care taken in its manufacture, thus proving that the inherent qualities must be wonderful. There is not a doubt that with careful cultivation and picking and proper manufacture, China could produce some of the finest Tea in the World.

IRWIN-HARRISONS & CROSSFIELD, Inc.

Robert L. Hecht,
SECRETARY

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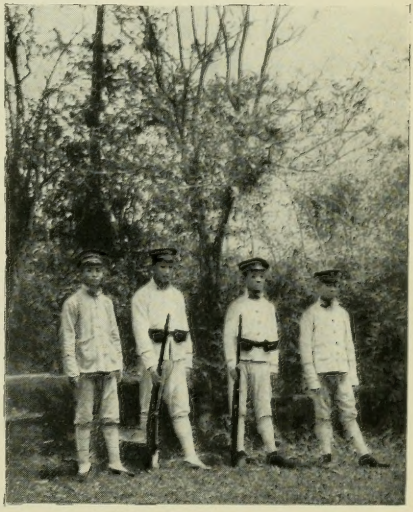
A TRIP
TO THE
KEEMUN TEA DISTRICT

IN the Spring, our long discussed project of a trip to the Keemun Tea district, to see at first hand the process of manufacture, was at length realized. For this, in part, we were indebted to the Chinese Government who provided us with an escort for the trip and notified the local authorities of our coming, so that most of the difficulties attendant upon foreigners travelling in the interior were removed.



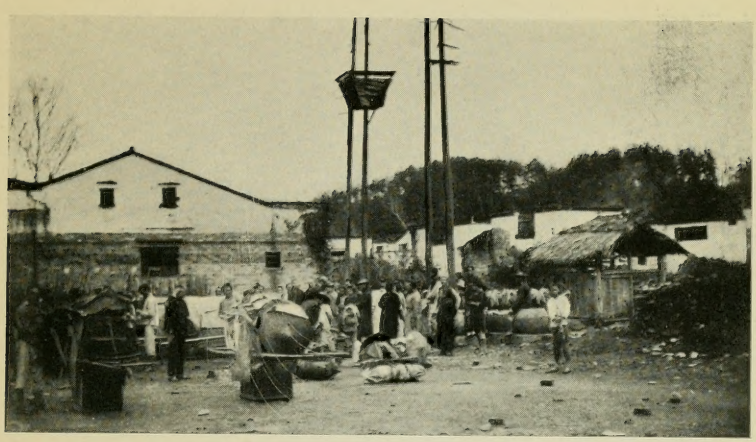
A MILITARY ESCORT

AT SHANGHAI RAILWAY STATION

On the 18th of March we left Shanghai by train South to Hangchow which we reached in a few hours; for the rest of our trip we were entirely dependent on Chinese means of locomotion—by boat and chair.

OUR TWO JUNKS WITH GOVERNMENT FLAGS

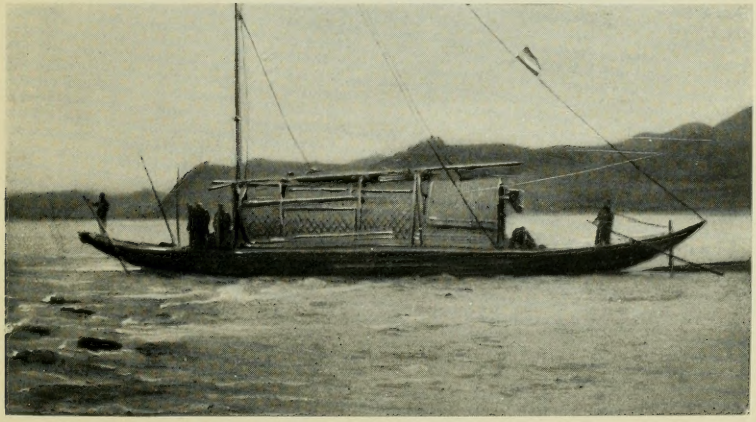
Leaving Hangchow by boat, we followed the course



OUR CHAIRS ARRIVING AT LIKOW

of the Tsien Tang Kiang River up to its source at Yuting, on the Eastern slopes of the Wooling Shan range. We had now been travelling for twelve days through picturesque hilly country. En route, we passed through the well-known green tea districts of Fychow and Tienkai.

From Yuting, a long day's journey by chair through a pass in the Wooling Shan, brought us to our objective, Kimun City, which, spelt as Keemun, is known all over the world.



HAULING UP A SMALL RAPID

SOLDIERS GUARDING OUR PACKS—TIENKAI

Kimun City, we made our headquarters for three weeks, staying at the Tea Guild, where rooms were kindly placed at our disposal. The city is a small one; the buildings and

RESTING AT A TEA HOUSE

City walls are in a bad state of repair ; the people generally are poor, and the district does not seem to have fully recovered from the ravages of the Tai Ping rebels of sixty and more years ago. The city itself withstood a long siege, though the country around was laid in waste.

TEA GUILD, KIMUN CITY

From Kimun we made a tour of the principal districts, the most noted being Likow, Chen Shang, Poncheng, from whence comes the noted "Sien Gar" Chop and Kow Tang. We were altogether eight days on this inspection. What we saw was a sad revelation—tea in China is indigenous, it is a hardy plant and grows

FACTORY AT LIKOW

TEA BUSHES AT GODONG

rather than is cultivated. Plantations, in the true sense of the word, do not exist—in some districts like Poncheng there are fair sized hills covered with tea, but for the most part the bushes exist but in small clearings on the hillsides, created by the farmers in their spare time; pruning and fertilizing are practically unknown and many of the bushes are choked with weeds.

THE BUYING DEPOT AT KEEMUN VILLAGE

Very few of the factory owners have any share or apparent interest in the tea grounds. The method of financing and collecting the tea is as follows: Early in the Spring, the Tea Broker Hongs work-

WOMEN PICKING TEA ON HILLS AT KEEMUN

ing from the Market Centre, say Hankow, Changhai or Foochow according to which district it may belong, send silver money, partly their own and partly borrowed from native banks, up to the district factories. These, as soon as the first leaf is picked, send agents into all the surrounding villages with money to open the leaf-buying depots.

It is an unfortunate fact that two-thirds of the process of manufacture are done by the countrymen on the hillsides and outlying villages, before the tea comes into the hands of the factories at all.

TEA GROWING ON HILLS OF KEEMUN

The owner of the bushes and his family pick the tea themselves, or rather strip the bushes of all green leaf. They have other business to attend to, such as rice cultivation and the rape seed crop to gather in ; so the speedier they collect the leaf the better. There is no premium on careful picking, as everyone's leaf is mixed up in the factories, where twigs and other rubbish have to be picked out by a number of children employed by the factory for that purpose.

The factories during the autumn, winter and early spring are deserted and closed, and on first arriving in the district, the

SUN DRYING TEA ON RIVER BANK NEAR FOWLING

question of where the necessary labor is to come from puzzles one. However, a few days before the leaf is ready for picking, the usual labor migration starts from the south, and all the main paths over the hills are alive with an endless procession of natives who sort themselves out among the villages of the district ; some for work in the factories, others on the hillsides.

The picking of the most forward bushes commences practically simultaneously ; the more backward bushes are left for a few days before picking, which explains the second and third packs.

As soon as the sun is up in the morning, and the dew dried from the leaf, picking begins. When sufficient has been gathered, the leaf is spread out thinly on matting in the sun to wither: then, when sufficiently soft, so that the thickest stems are no

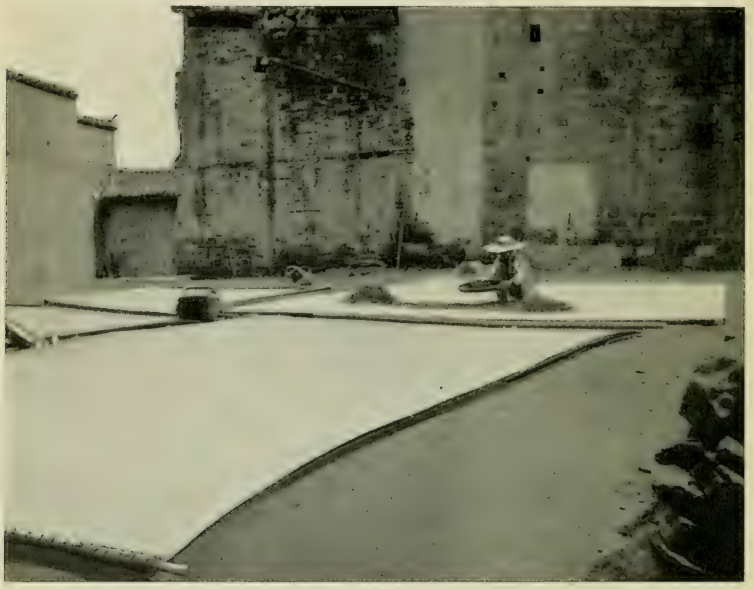
ROLLING TEA BY HAND

longer brittle, it is placed on the rolling table and manipulated in large balls by the hands, for a few minutes, until well bruised and sticky with its own sap.

WITHERING THE GREEN TEA LEAF

The leaf is now ready for fermenting, and is placed in large circular baskets, covered over with a cloth and placed in the sun. The process may last for an hour or two hours, according to the temperature of the day. The leaf is stirred around several times, so that the fermentation may be even throughout. When finished, the leaf will have turned copper-colored.

The countryman has still one more task to perform, that of sun drying. The fermented leaf is spread out thin on mats



TEA-DRYING ON MATS—KEEMUN

in the sun and soon assumes a reddish black color, as the moisture is drawn out of the leaf.

When properly sun-dried, the leaf loses 50% or more of the original green leaf weight. The countryman now gathers up his leaf into a bag and makes his way into the nearest village where he eventually sells it to the depot which will pay the highest price.

YE GREAT TEA MEN OF GODONG

The factory buyers have to be shrewd men, able to judge how much moisture still remains in the leaf, as some countrymen try to skimp the sun drying. However, this often recoils on them, as they get a poor price, because over-damp tea may go sour in transit to the factory.

Each day the depot sends its purchases to their factory, where, after a preliminary firing to preserve it, it is stored until sufficient leaf has been collected to make one or two hundred packages of finished tea.

JOSS HOUSE USED FOR STORAGE

LEAD LININGS FACTORY

The final stage has now been reached and it remains for the factory to produce the finished article. The leaf, as bought by them, is a long, sprawley article of reddish black color, in style rather resembling Pouchong tea.

TEA ON ITS WAY TO POYANG LAKE

A light firing renders the leaf brittle, and it is then broken down to the size, as known to the trade, by being passed through a complicated system of sieves, of various sized mesh, manipulated by hand, some in lateral motion, and some in rotary motion—at various stages, this system enables the workmen to remove small stalks and any coarse leaf tea.

When the leaf has all been worked down to the required size, it is

ready for the final firings; of these, there are usually three, the tea being placed in baskets over slow charcoal fires. Firing by the Chinese method is a great art, and though laborious is undoubtedly superior to the machine firing, as is evident by the superior keeping powers of China tea. The repeated firings are to insure the expelling of all moisture from the leaf, slowly, without destroying the flavor and substance of the tea.

The leaf is then carefully bulked, and after again being lightly fired, is packed while still warm into the well-known lead-lined China half-chests; it is now ready for transporting to the market in Hankow.

From the Kimun side of the Wooling Shang range, a number of small rivers flow westward into the Poyang lake, which in turn connects with the Yangtsze River. This is the route by which the Keemun teas reach Hankow, and which we followed. The first part of the journey from Keemun to Jowchow, at the entrance to the Poyang lake, is done in very small boats propelled by oars, as the river is very shallow—only a few packages of tea can be carried in each. When, however, the Lake is reached, the small boats transfer their cargoes to big junks which have a capacity of several thousand

SCENE AT JOWCHOW—ENTRANCE TO POYANG LAKE

packages each. These are towed by launch through the Lake to Kiukiang, the first river port on the Yangtsze, where they in turn discharge into the big river steamers which deliver the cargo in Hankow in eighteen hours.

From Kimun to Hankow takes approximately eight days—we reached Hankow on the eighteenth of May, having been in the interior nearly ten weeks.

From the foregoing description, it will be seen how dependent the manufacture of tea in China is upon the weather conditions. Moreover, as the finest Keemuns are all made in about a fortnight, it is very much a case of putting all one's eggs in one basket.

This explains, doubtless, the big variations from year to year in teas from the same district.

S. W. HARRIS

of Harrisons, King & Irwin, Ltd.

INSPECTING A TEMPLE—KEEMUN

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